(c) whether any substantial steps are being taken to protect the interests of the consumers and if so, the details thereof; and

(d) by when the new legislation is likely to be brought forward in Parliament?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD) (a) Yes. Sir.

(b) and (c) The proposals fur amendment to the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 mainly relate to speedier disposal of cases in the Consumer Courts giving more powers to the Consumer fora to better protet the interest of *Consumers,* constitution of benches of National/ State Commissions, setting up District Consumer Protection Council, etc.

(d) The proposals are being finalized in consultation with Ministry of Law to introduce the Amendment Bill in Parliament as soon as possible.

Increase in the Prices of Essential Commodities

504. SHRIMATI BASANTI SARMA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the prices of essential commodities in the country have been increasing for the last one year;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the reasons therefore; and

(d) the effective measures being taken or proposed to be taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF

CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD); (a) to (c) The percentage variations in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) numbers of selected essential commodities during the last one year as on 8.7.2000 are riven below;

Commodity	Percentage variation
	(8.7.2000/10.7,1999)
Rice	0.7
Wheat	6.5
Gram	17.6
Arhar	-6.0
Potato	-16.2
Onion	-45.5
Tea	-17.3
Sugar	5.4
Salt	-18.3
Vanaspati	-11.6
Groundnut Oil	3.1
Mustard Oil	-15.9

(d) The Government has taken a number of steps to control the prices and augment the availability of essential commodities in the country. Apart from certain long terms measures to increase production of essential goods, import of items having gap in their demand and supply, like pulses have been placed under OGL at zero per cent import duty. Export of onion has been placed under quantitative restriction. *Some of* the essential commodities like rice, wheat, pamolein sugar and kerosene are also supplied through the outlets of public distribution system at below market prices. Stringent actions are being taken against hoarders, black marketeers and others indulging in unfair trade practices under the Essential Commodities Act and Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act by the State/UT Governments.